

# THE VANISHED RUIN ERA

SAN FRANCISCO'S  
CLASSIC ARTISTRY OF  
RUIN

STELLMANN



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# THE VANISHED RUIN ERA

SAN FRANCISCO'S CLASSIC  
ARTISTRY OF RUIN DEPICTED  
IN PICTURE AND SONG

BY  
LOUIS J. STELLMANN



UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

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[iii]

## DEDICATION

To you who faced with me the good and evil  
Of that mad frenzy and the aftermath,  
Who stood, unshaken by the earth's upheaval,  
My comrade and my helper on Life's path.

To you, who shared with me the stress and danger,  
Who watched, with me, our stricken city grow,  
To whom Hope was a brother, Fear a stranger,  
Needless to name you—you and I will know.





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"Like some ghost city rising from night" — *Frontispiece*

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## PASSING OF THE MODERN ACROPOLIS



ALMOST like a dream is the memory-vision of that horror of flame and palpitating earth which came upon us, April 18, 1906. Traveler or resident in the reconstructed city, to-day, finds it difficult to imagine or recall the utter, awful devastation which then prevailed. Here and there, as one journeys through the town, one sees waste places, as though some ordinary fire had occurred. But, from the hills, where San Francisco may be viewed as a whole, one sees only great and teeming urban vistas, architecturally imposing and complete.

Yet, to those upon whose minds the panorama of events in the four reconstructive years is ineffaceably impressed, there are memories beautiful as well as awesome. Among these are the pictures of that modern Acropolis which the Fire God created, that ephemeral and vanished ruin era which in its weird, flame-wrought transformation, made things of beauty out of hovels; which carved shapes of classic dignity out of structural atrocities; which lent a touch of magical, if spurious, age-refinement to the fire-ravished areas, akin to the decadent and time-hallowed grandeur of Athens and of Rome.

It was a feature of San Francisco's recent history which few noted to the full extent and which fewer cherished or endeavored to perpetuate. Nor is this strange, for there was much of other work to do. Our pride, the nation's sympathetic interest and the business of the world demanded that our city be rebuilt without delay.

And, how splendidly we responded to that call! It has been the marvel of all men, the inspiration of all cities since afflicted. Ere the three-days' storm of fire had subsided, San Francisco began its resurrection. While the flames were yet devouring one end of the city, the other end resounded with the hammer-blows of reconstructive workmen. To the thousands of sympathizers who sought to offer comfort, we turned a deaf ear. We were too busy planning for the new city to mourn for the old.



Such was the spirit of our citizenship, which flame could not destroy; such the secret of our phenomenal restoration. And, if in our passionate energy to recreate, we subordinated somewhat of our esthetic quality, surely that was to be called a virtue, not a fault. The past four years have been a time for workers.

Nevertheless, I am very glad that some of us have striven to preserve this classic artistry of ruin which was unique as it was beautiful. It was a part of our stirring reconstructive life and it deserves to be depicted. It mellowed the horror of our desolation; it softened the tenure of our grief. It uplifted the spirit and succored the mind in depression, like an oasis of inspiration in the weary desert of our travail.

So I, for one, have endeavored to preserve it in picture and song. It has been a glad task and one which I believe to be worthy and not unimportant, for there are many to whom the spirit of it should appeal. They are not alone those who know these things by heart, who looked upon these wondrous architectural fragments first as gravestones of a cherished recollection, but later as impressive monuments of new hope. There will be many who have never seen our ruins or the city that was before, who will find a responsive note in these chronicles of a vanished era, rich in natural splendor, brief in tenure, but worthy of perpetuation for the sake of sentiment and art.

LOUIS J. STELLMANN.

# THE VANISHED RUIN ERA

[2]

1906

My city! alas, my city!  
I saw you, in anguish, slain;  
And all of the world is bitter  
With Memory's blighting pain.





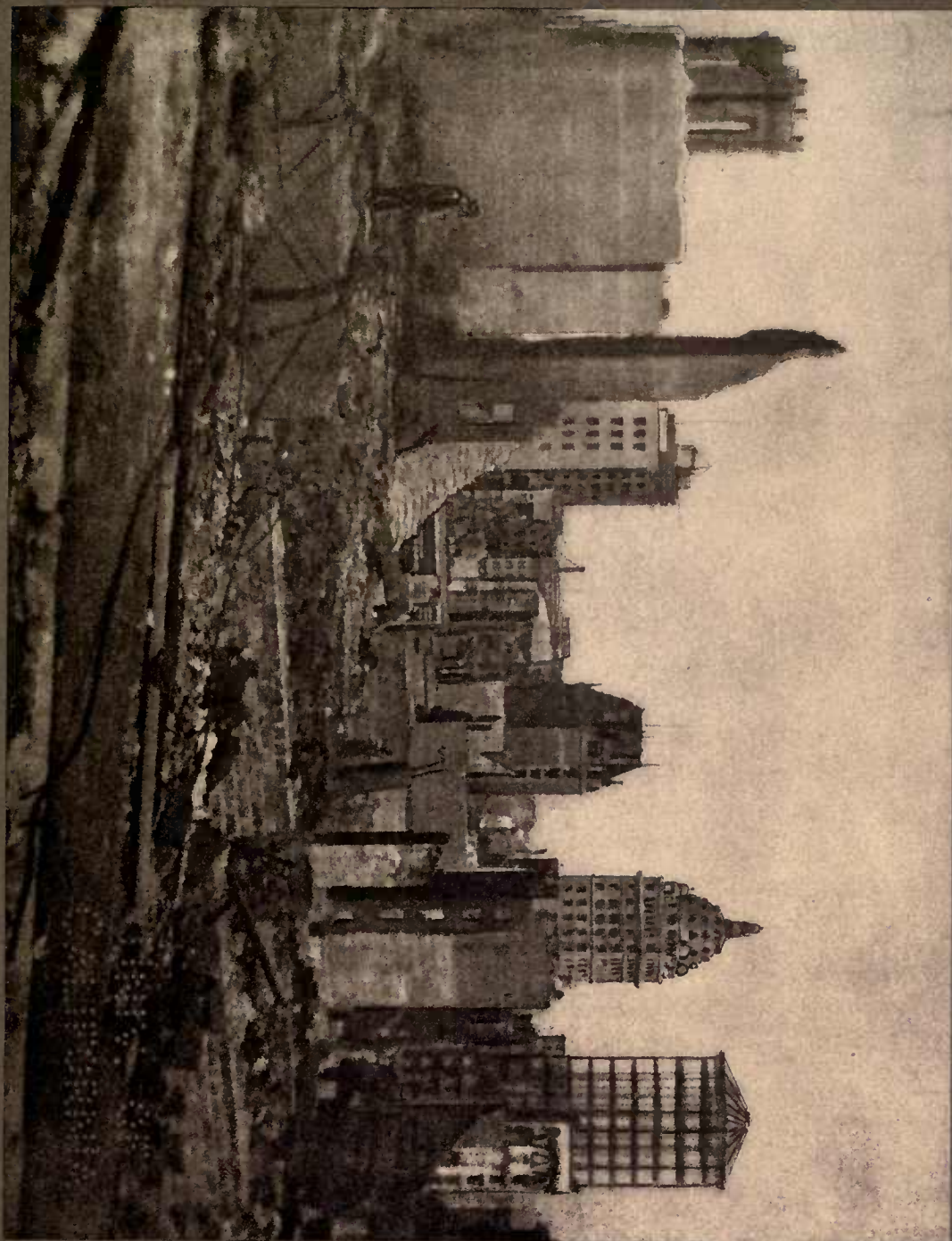
[4]

1906

(Continued)

I wander, a soul in darkness;  
It seems that my heart has bled  
Afresh with each blackened ruin  
Where things that I love lie dead.







# THE PHANTOM HOSTELRY

Ghostly hostel, weirdly looming,  
 Through the branches, bleak and bare,  
 Spectral shadow-forms assuming:—  
 You are like a spirit glooming,  
 Earth-bound in its grim despair!

In your broken might despising  
 Habitations fresh with life,  
 All about you now uprising—  
 Proud Decadence, canonizing  
 The Disaster's mortal strife!





## THE SENTINEL

A gaunt survivor of the horrid fray  
That raged about him, laying low his mates,  
The blackened oak, grim ghost of Yesterday,  
Stands sentry at the ravaged garden's gates.

Here, once, caparisoned in royal might  
Of vernal robes, he cast benignant shade  
Upon a sward where it was his delight  
To shelter little children as they played.

Now, stripped of splendor, blasted and deformed,  
He stands, still faithful to his former trust,  
Amid the shambles where the battle stormed;—  
A stricken hero of the holocaust.

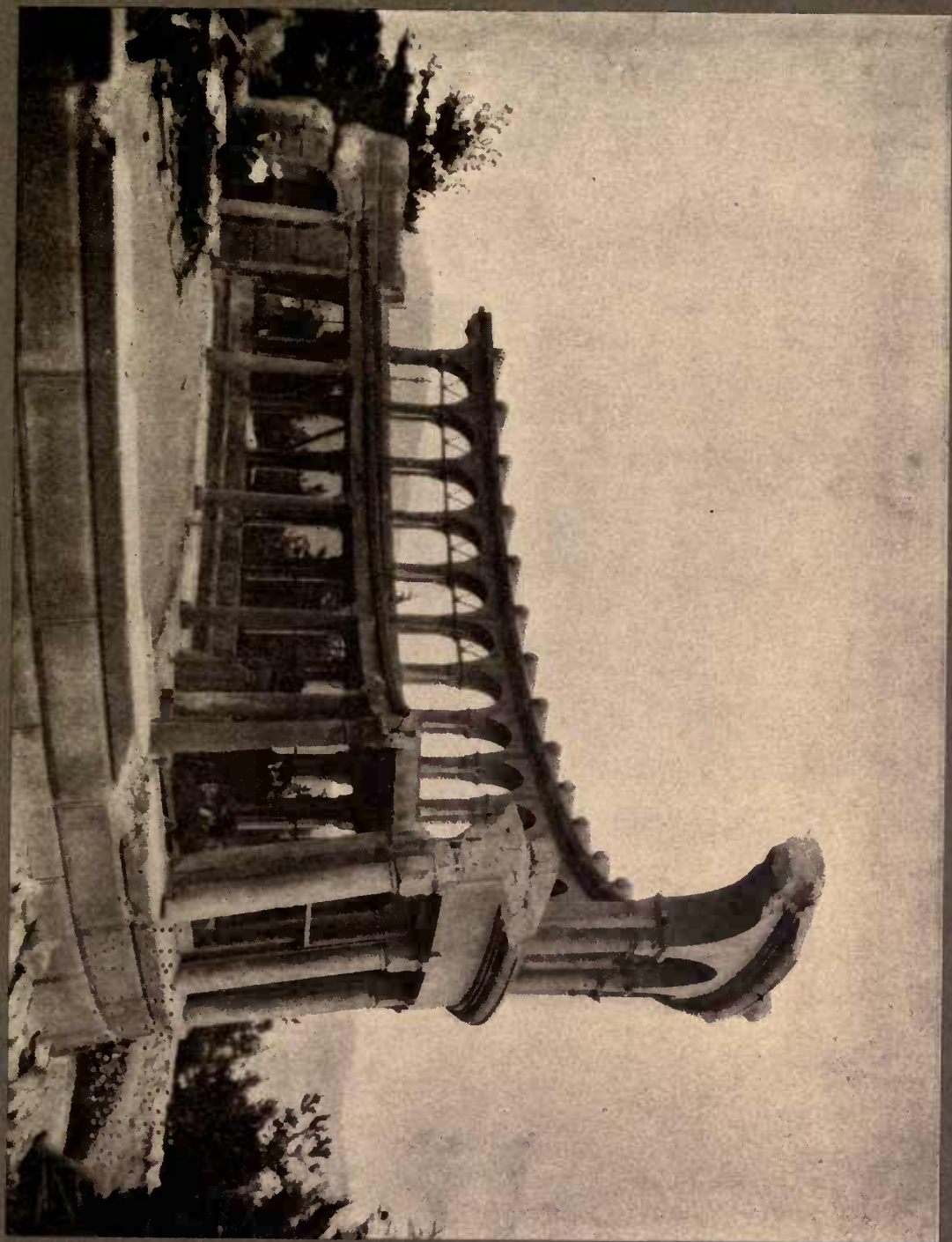




## STRAWBERRY HILL OBSERVATORY

Once it stood, a stately structure,  
On a lofty eminence,  
Looking down, in haughty grandeur  
On a vast and fair expanse.  
Loomed, at sunset, like a castle  
O'er some feudal lord's domain—  
Pride of loyal knight and vassal—  
In a medieval reign.  
But, as once came men and horses  
To assail a duke's redoubt,  
So came Nature's mighty forces,  
This high citadel to rout.  
Shattered now and desolated,  
Lies the castle on the hill,—  
Monument of passions sated,—  
Regal in its ruin still.





## THE RAVAGED TEMPLE

Where hundreds kneeled in worship to their God,  
Where swelled the organ's mighty, rhythmic pray'r  
And voices blent in chorused reverence,  
The stricken temple rears, like pleading arms,  
Its naked, fleshless towers to the sky,—



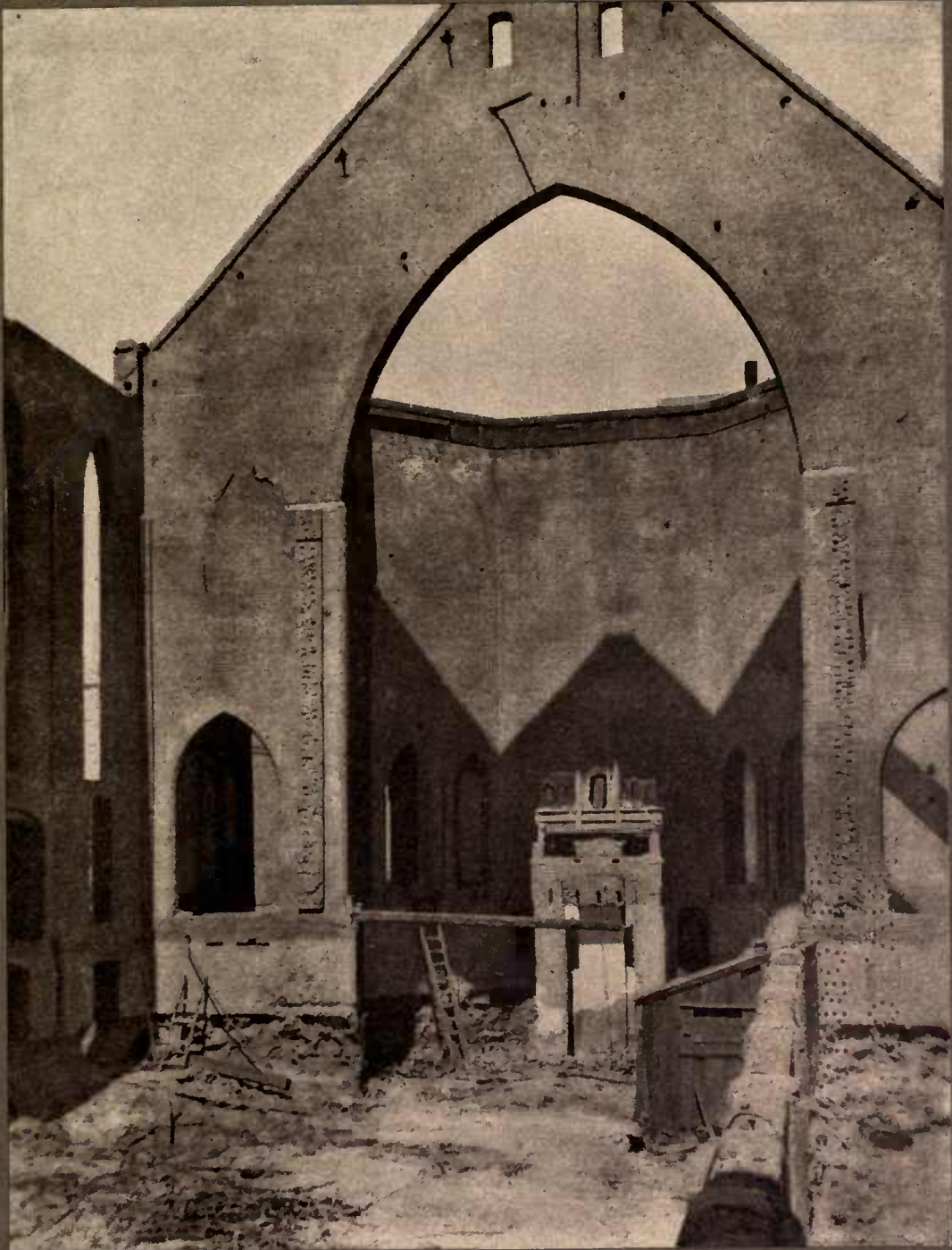


THE RAVAGED TEMPLE

(Continued)

Unspared, for all its sanctity; unheard  
Its cry for mercy when the flaming sword  
Smote, right and left, impartial, laying low  
The house of worship and the den of shame.



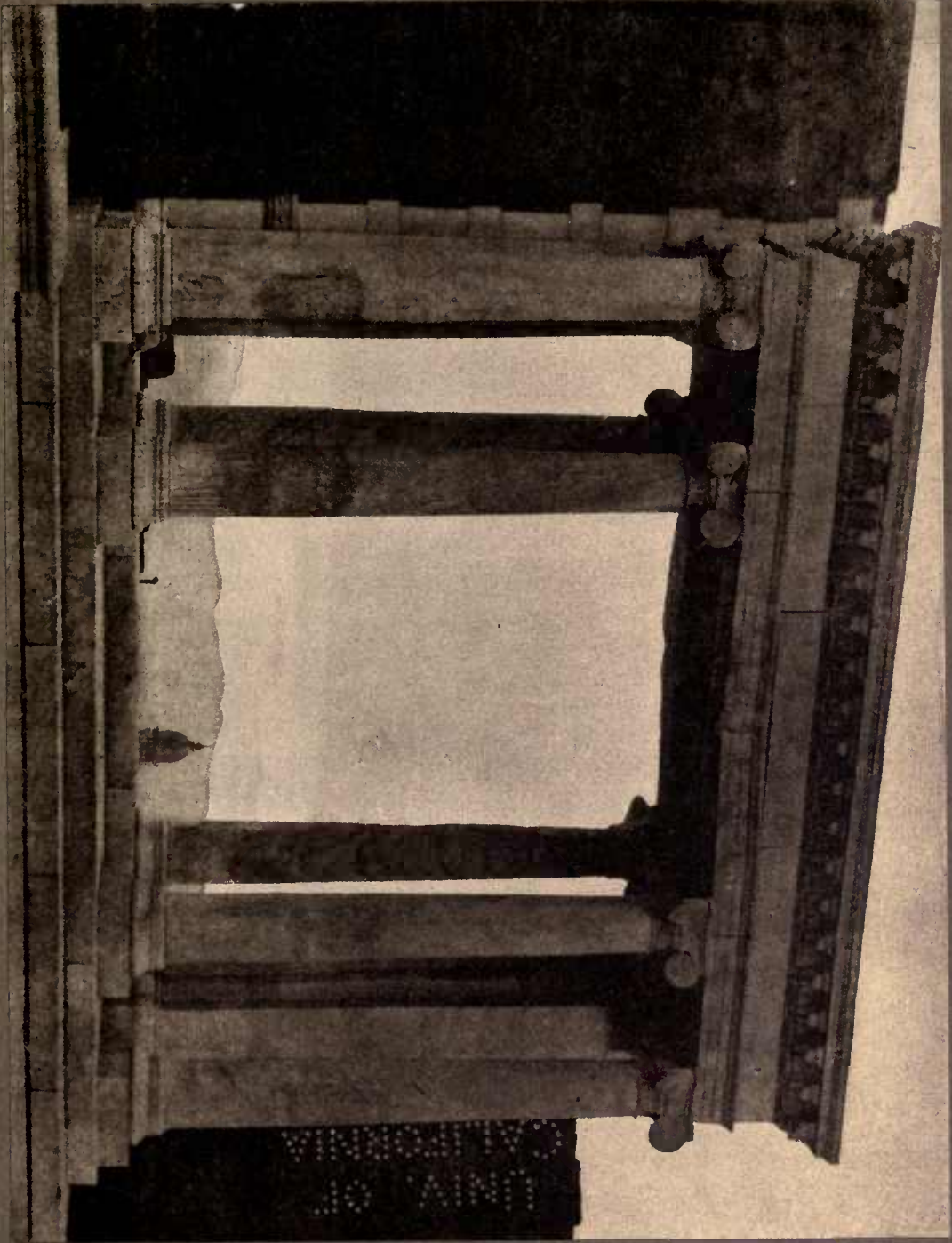


A PORTAL OF THE PAST

Like a phantom doorway, giving  
On the Hall of Memory,  
Stands the broken portal—living  
Threshold of the Used-to-be.

Naught but space beyond—below it  
Debris of the mansion's fall  
At its side, pathetic, clinging  
Remnants of the shattered wall.



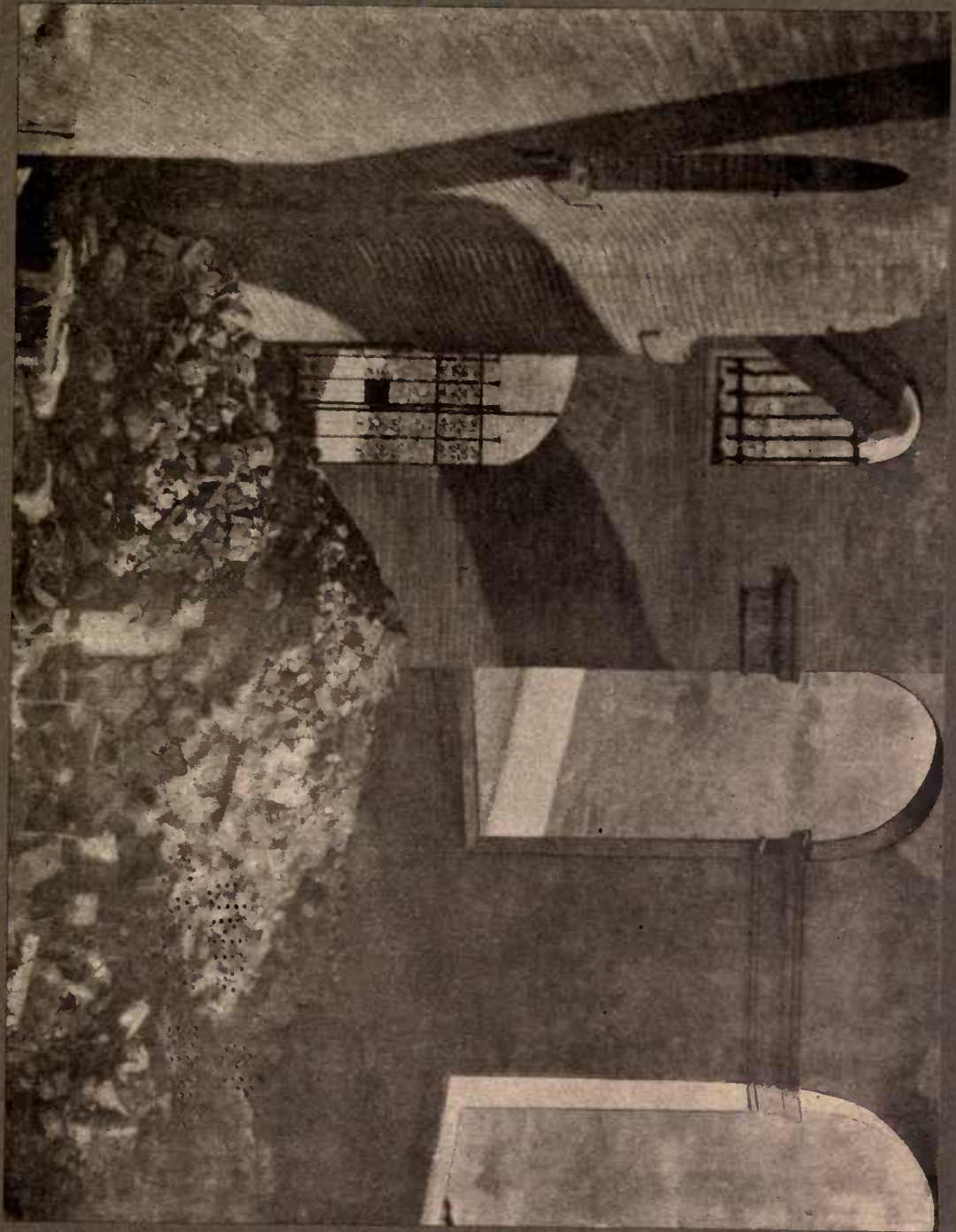


A PORTAL OF THE PAST

(Continued)

Gone the wealth of pomp and splendor,  
Treasures of the brush and loom;  
Artistry of smith and builder,  
Mingled in their ashen doom.





[20]

1907

From out of your wreck, appalling,  
Uprising in strength, anew,  
I hear you, my city, calling  
Your favored ones back to you.





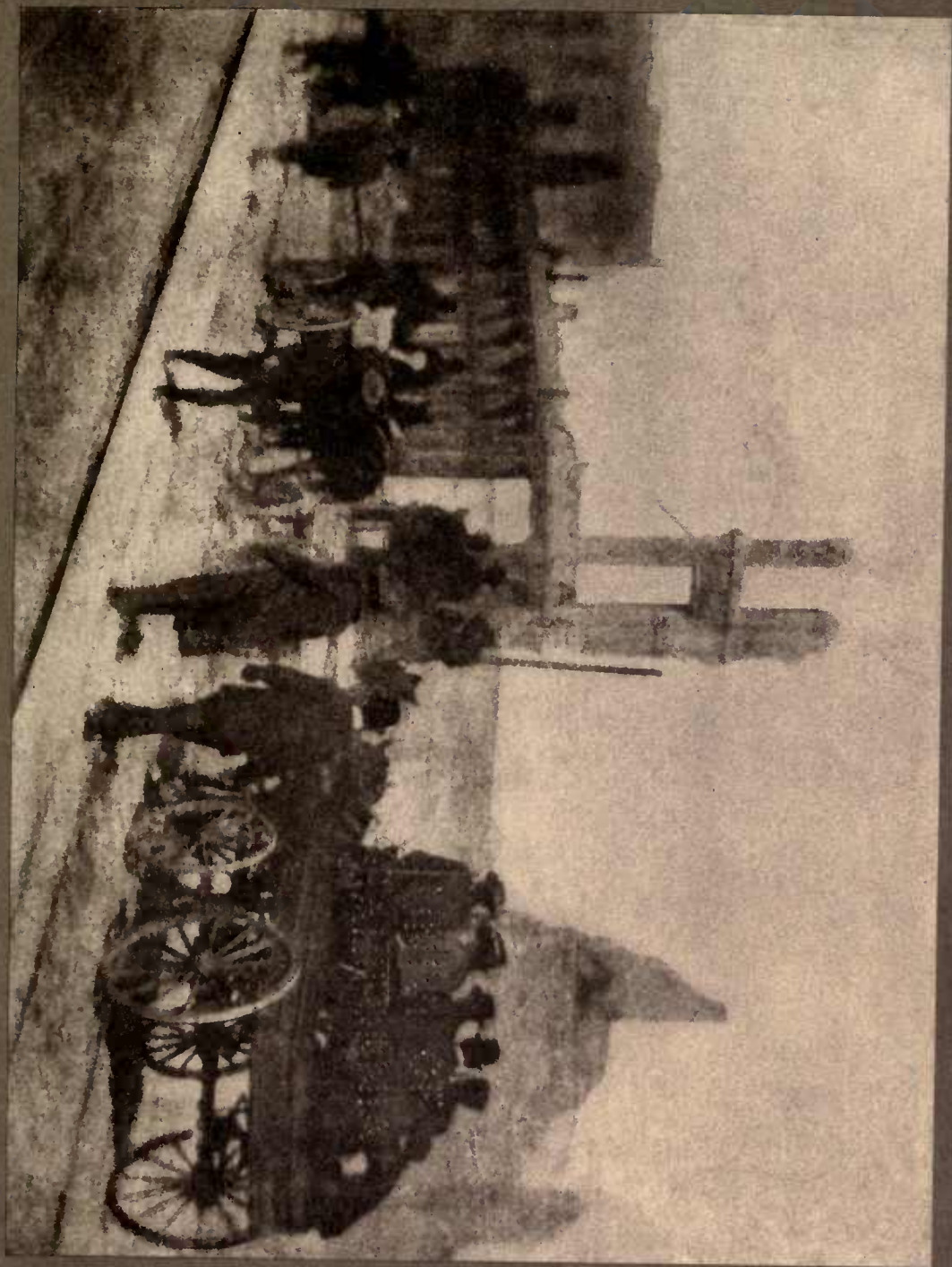
[22]

1907

(Continued)

And many that left you stricken,  
Dividing throughout the land,  
Will hear and their steps will quicken,  
Ah, gladly, at your command.

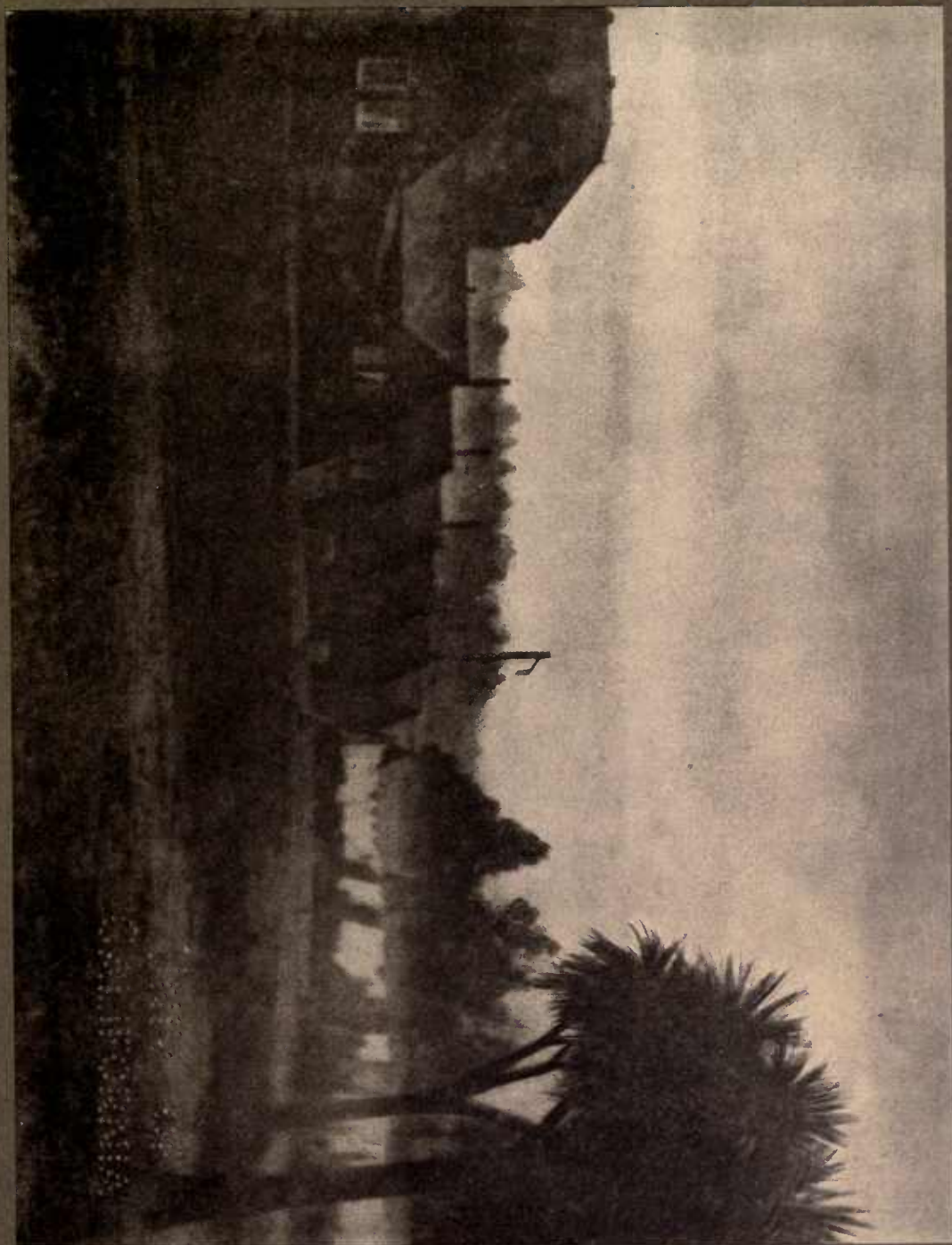




TWILIGHT IN THE REFUGEE CAMP

Softly, mystic'lly appealing,  
Comes the twilight shadow, stealing  
    O'er the camp of refugees;  
Like a sombre veil, obscuring  
    All of Day's activities,  
Weary men to slumber luring,  
In gray mezzo-tints immuring  
    Silhouetted huts and trees.





## THE OLD HALL OF JUSTICE

Where once was a clamor of voices,  
Loud warring in bitter debate,  
Where once sat the stern, silent judges,  
Dispensing the wrong-doer's fate;  
Where slow, sullen footfalls resounded,  
As prisoners, heavy with gloom,  
Passed through the grim Gates of Confinement  
And into the presage of doom—  
There stands now a tottering ruin,  
Decrepit and old and forlorn;  
Hard-smitten by Nature's upheaval,  
Its power and majesty shorn.  
But wholesome and purged of its vices—  
Refined by the flame in its fall—  
It seems like a penitent, ghostly:  
This shell of the old Justice Hall.





IN A RUINED GARDEN

Memories of vanished splendor  
 'Round the ruined garden cling:  
 Of a maid, divinely tender,  
 Watching o'er each growing thing;

Of a youth who gazed, enchanted,  
 Leaning on the fountain's bowl,—  
 Guessing not the gard'ner planted  
 Seeds of love within his soul;

While a gray-haired couple, smiling  
 From a vine-clad porch, near-by,  
 Watched—their aged minds beguiling  
 With the thoughts that never die;

Dreamed of childhood that had vanished,  
 Dreamed of children to be born.  
 Ah! the gladness that was banished  
 On a flaming April morn!





IN A RUINED GARDEN

(Continued)

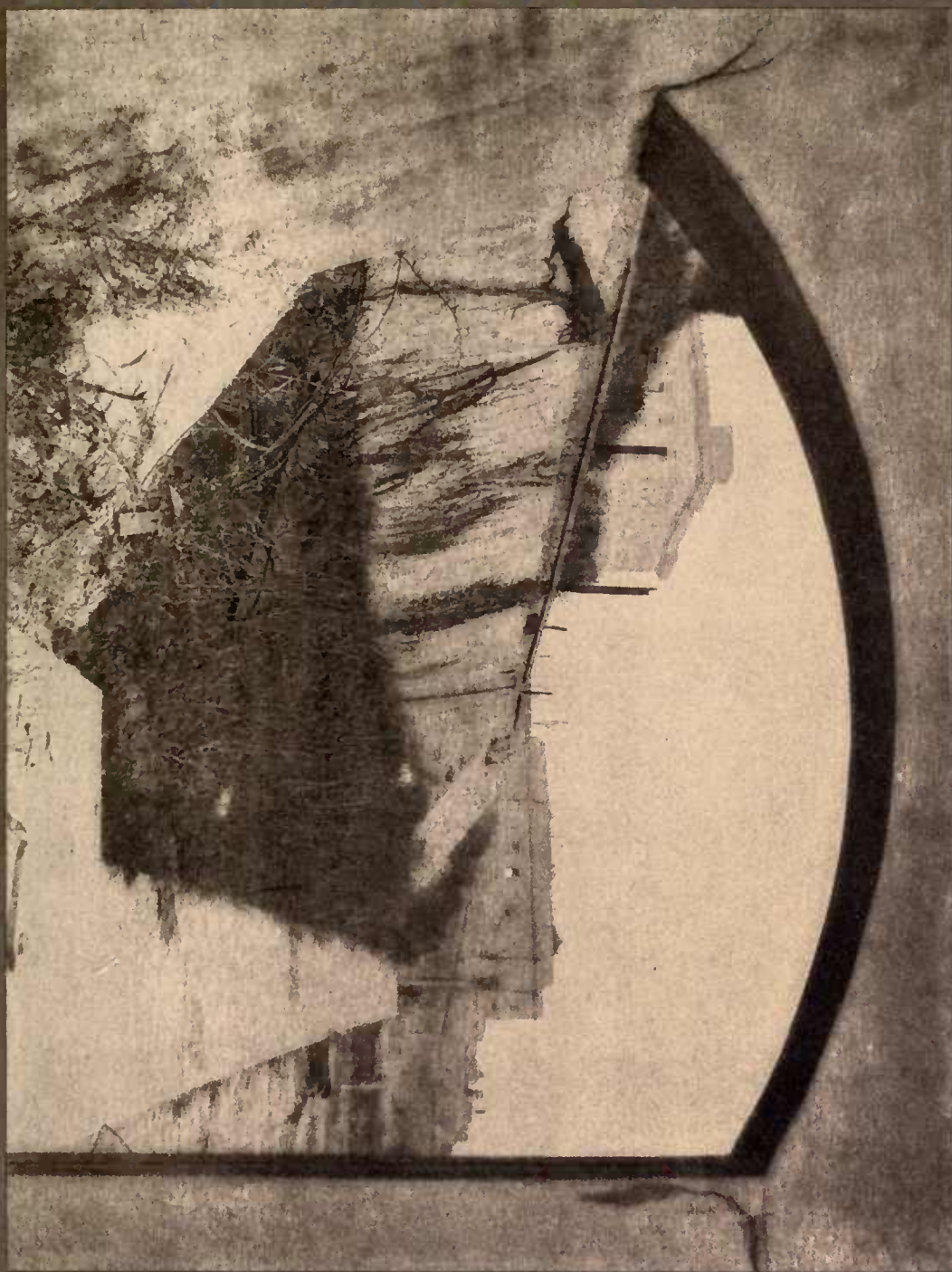
Desolate the garden, scattered  
Now the ones who used to roam  
In its bowers—withered, shattered,  
Regal bloom and stately home.

\* \* \* \* \*

Yet, 'tis said, when Day has ended  
And good folk are all abed,  
Phantom footsteps oft are wended  
To some ruined flower-bed.

Lovers tryst, their voices blending  
With the fountain's plash once more;  
Stricken bloom uprises, lending  
Scent and beauty as of yore.





THE CITY HALL STATUE

Am I to fall and crumble into dust,  
 My fragments trampled underfoot, unknown?—  
 I, who have stood for years in pride and trust  
 Of power, regnant, on my eyrie throne?

Through days uncounted, I have watched, serene,  
 The puerile, human throng pass, far below.  
 Silent, in mock importance I have seen  
 The rulers of our city come and go.

The honest and the criminal have dwelt  
 And wrought their destinies beneath my feet;  
 Have legislated wisely and have smelt,  
 Like hungry curs, the Tempter's carrion meat.

Here stood I, calm, undaunted, while the Earth  
 Shook, in its palsy, like a withered hand.  
 Here I have watched the city's sure rebirth  
 From Nature's fury and the fire's brand.



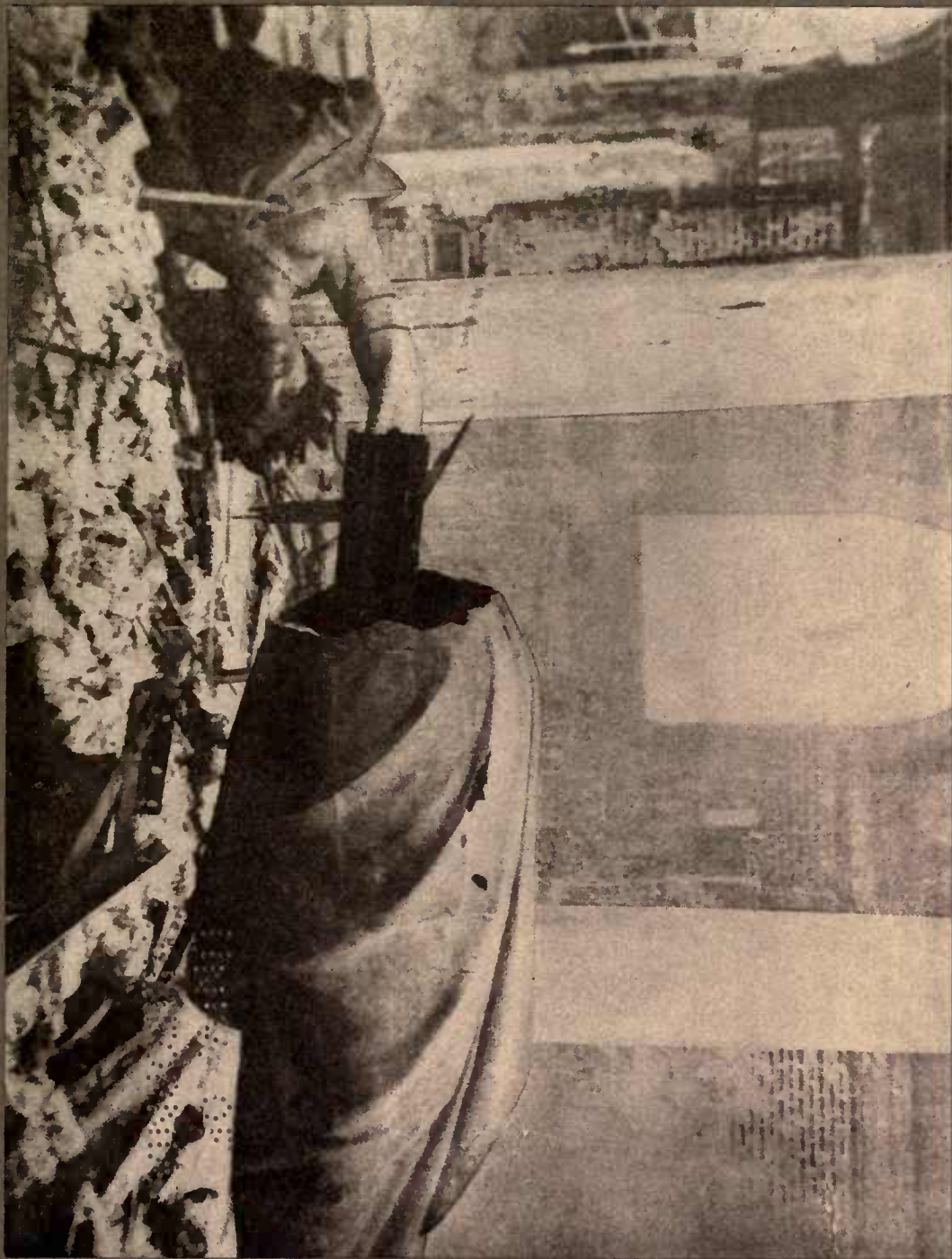


THE CITY HALL STATUE

(Continued)

Ah, gruesome jest of Fate! that I have foiled  
God's mighty elements, to end my span  
Of life—a vandal's prey—to be despoiled  
Of being by the hand of puny Man!



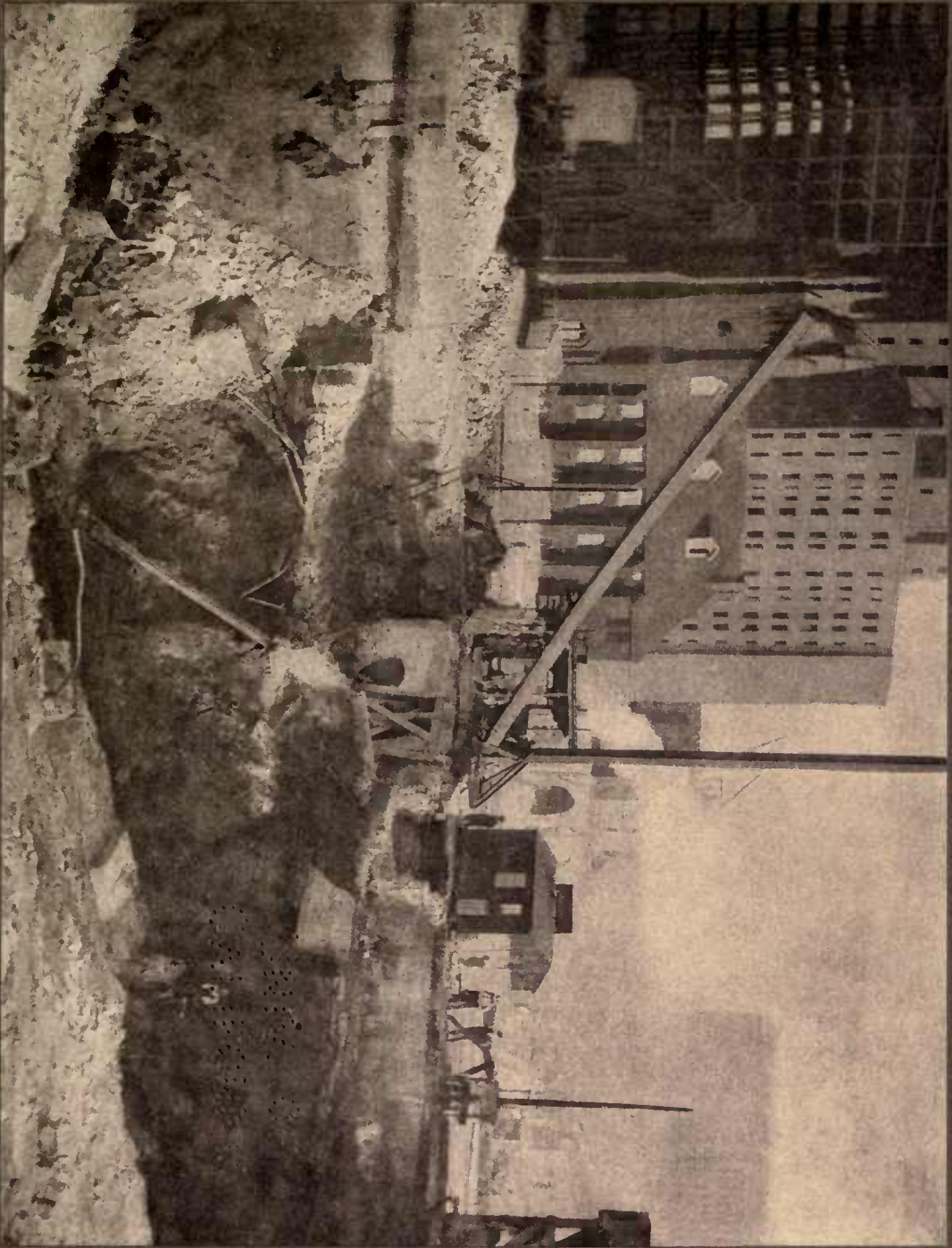


[36]

1908

I hear the ring of the hammers,—  
A rhythm of lusty might  
To chorus a Song of Progress,  
Unceasing by day or night.





[38]

1908

(Continued)

I see you, my city, growing  
To grandeur before unknown;  
I feel that a splendid future  
Will soon for the past atone.





## VISTAS THROUGH AN ARCHWAY

Framed by the broken archway's classic lines,  
 One sees delightful vistas that should tempt  
 An artist. Every hour brings a change.  
 First comes the dawn, with faint, vague multichrome  
 Of grayish yellows that reveal a place  
 Of domes and turrets, silhouetted, dim,  
 Like some ghost city, rising from the night.  
 And then the robust morn comes forth to bathe  
 All in its hues of vital rose, to ride  
 On, like a herald for the royal day  
 And chase the ling'ring shadows from their nooks.

All this one sees, as if a picture, hung  
 In some gigantic gallery, endowed  
 With magic to reflect the Nature-mood  
 Of every hour—through the broken arch.

Through it one might have seen the city grow  
 From ashes to the new metropolis—  
 A stirring panorama of Man's power  
 And zeal and dominance o'er wreck and blight.  
 Through it, at night, one sees the gleaming stars,  
 High overhead, while, far below, the town  
 Winks back, defiant, at the Universe.  
 With many thousand lesser lights that shine  
 And blend, like an inverted Milky Way.

Carved by the Flame God from a mansion's front,  
 The archway gives no longer on a hall  
 Where liveried servants answered to the ring  
 Of many guests. It frames a larger scene;  
 Gives men a nobler outlook than of yore  
 And typifies an era, nearly closed,  
 When San Francisco, rising, in her might,  
 From stress and ruin, garbed herself afresh  
 And showed the world a newer, fairer face,  
 Framed in the memory of her late despair.





IN A CLASSIC RUIN

Rome boasts of its sanctified ruins,  
 Time-hallowed and grand in decay.  
 The age-smitten temples of Athens  
 Cry out of a long-vanished day.  
 They stand, in their gray desolation,  
 For ages historic and grim;  
 For passions that sundered the nation,  
 And lusts that Time only can dim.

But, here, in our busy metropolis—  
 Rebuilding as soon as it fell—  
 The splendor of modern Acropolis  
 Was but an ephemeral spell.

Ah, era of tragical beauty  
 That came with the Fire-Demon's sway!  
 You served but to show men their duty.  
 Your tenure was just for a day.  
 Yet, though you were part of a story  
 Of emprises quickly regained,  
 I grieve that your mystical glory  
 Could not, for a time, have remained.





THE OLD AND THE NEW

As a garden, Winter-stricken,  
 Hears the clarion call of Spring,  
 Does a blasted city quicken,  
 As a vital, new-born thing  
 With the flower of Man's vigor,  
 Rearing to the shrine of Trade  
 Temples nobler, finer, bigger  
 Than the Fire-god has unmade.

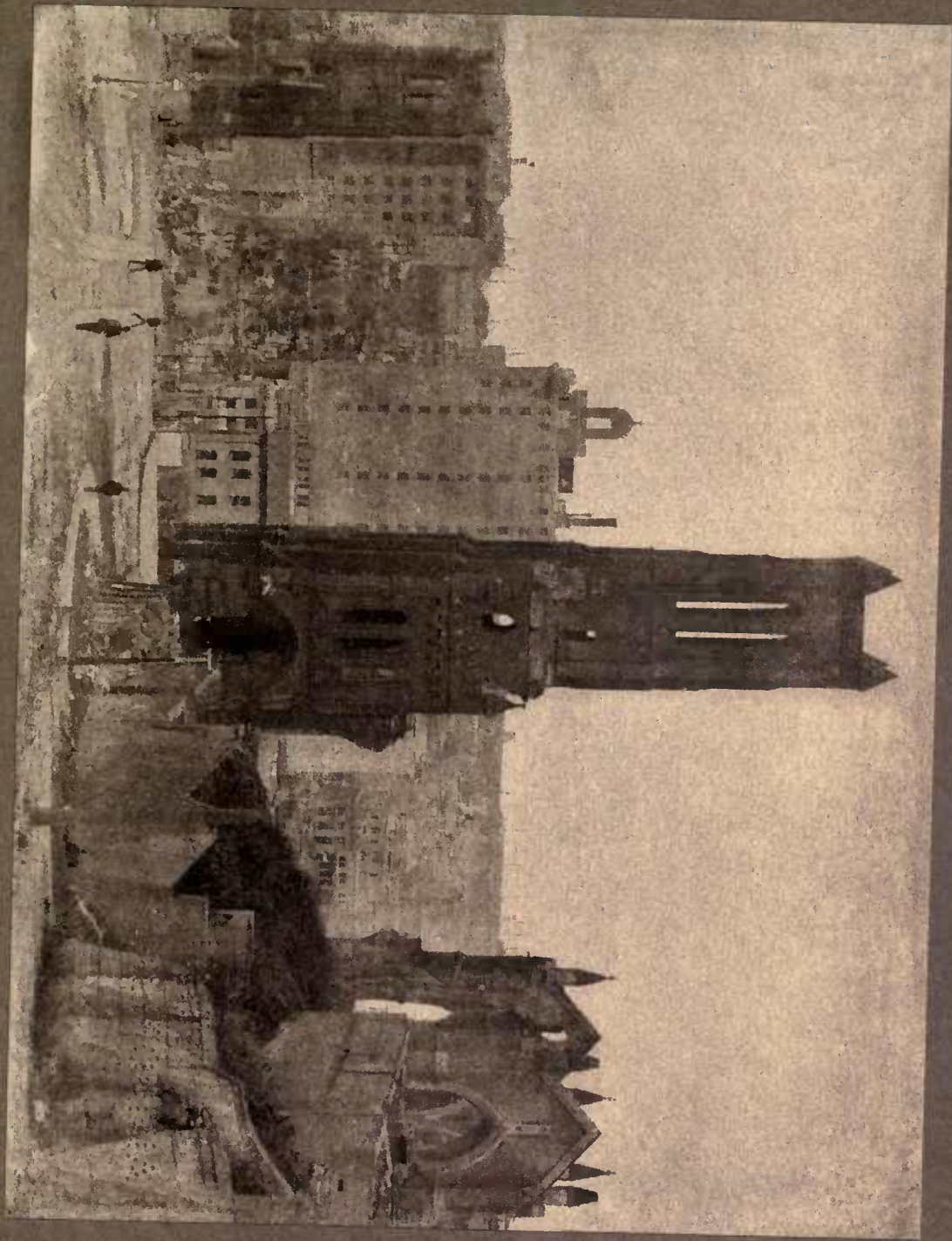




THE OLD AND THE NEW  
(Continued)

Like a sturdy sapling, growing  
From a trunk the woodsman slew,—  
Devastation overthrowing:  
Thus the city's Old and New.





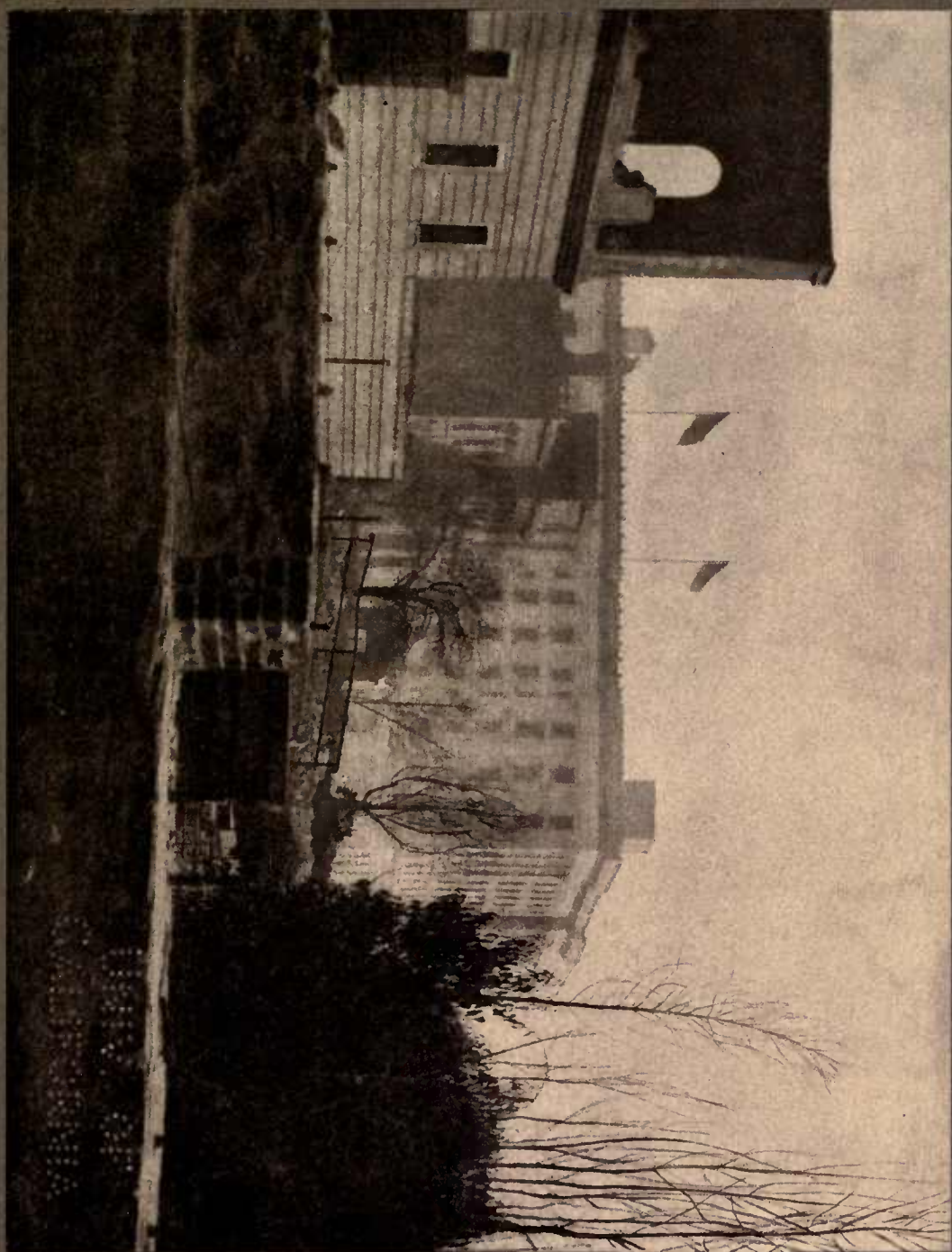
## NOB HILL

Here, in power, dwelt the nabobs  
On their structure-jewelled hilltop,  
Looking down upon the valley,  
    As the evening shadows crept,  
Phantom-like, upon the city;  
Watched the lights leap out in battle;  
Saw the urban constellation  
    Keeping guard while Mammon slept.

Here the Demon of Destruction  
Fought its way, relentless, climbing  
Steep declivities to conquer  
    Splendid mansions in its lust,  
While aristocrats descended,  
Fleeing with their humbler brothers,—  
Saw their costly habitations  
    Fall and crumble into dust.

But the routed are retrieving.  
Once again, the Hill of Nabobs  
Is returning to the glory  
    Of its former pomp and might.  
Stately structures are arising,  
Swiftly, from the sodden ashes,—  
Architectural phalanxes  
    Scattering all trace of blight.





[50]

1909

And, now, in the new metrop'lis  
My city I see, once more  
In all of the old, glad spirit  
That lived in the Time Before.





[ 52 ]

1909

(Continued)

Again, in my heart is comfort;  
Again, in my soul is rest.  
No more do I wander, homeless,—  
Oh, City-I-Love-the-Best!

























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